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BIOWARE

THE SILENT GROVE

DAVID GAIDER | ALEXANDER FREED | CHAD HARDIN

DRAGON AGE™

THE SILENT GROVE

Part 1 of 6

Almost a decade ago, the terror of the Fifth Blight swept the nation of Ferelden. Civil war soon followed, as King Cailan died in battle against the monstrous darkspawn, and a usurper took his place.

Only the actions of a few heroes—King Cailan's brother Alistair among them—prevented utter devastation. Since then, the new King Alistair has ruled with a steady hand and seen to his homeland's reconstruction.

But Ferelden is not the world, and its troubles thread through distant lands. Today, a ship arrives in a northern port, and its passengers would unearth a secret that could change everything . . .

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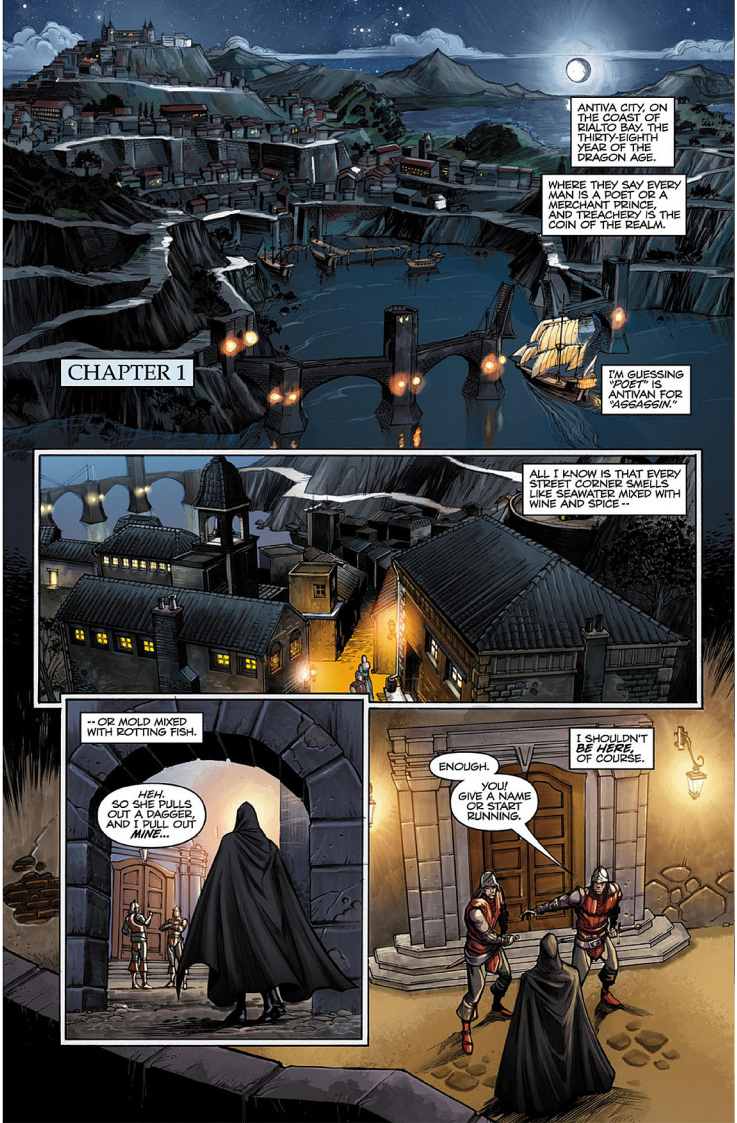
ANTIVA CITY, ON THE COAST OF RIALTO BAY. THE THIRTY-EIGHTH YEAR OF THE DRAGON AGE.
WHERE THEY SAY EVERY MAN IS A POET OR A MERCHANT PRINCE, AND TREACHERY IS THE COIN OF THE REALM.
CHAPTER 1
I'M GUESSING "POET" IS ANTIVAN FOR "ASSASSIN."
ALL I KNOW IS THAT EVERY STREET CORNER SMELLS LIKE SEAWATER MIXED WITH WINE AND SPICE --
-- OR MOLD MIXED WITH ROTTING FISH.
HEH. SO SHE PULLS OUT A DAGGER, AND I PULL OUT MINE...
I SHOULDN'T BE HERE, OF COURSE.
ENOUGH.
YOU! GIVE A NAME OR START RUNNING.

MY NAME IS ALISTAIR THEIRIN, AND I'M KING OF FERELDEN.
SON OF MARIC THE SAVIOR?
YOU'RE... REALLY NOT CONVINCED, ARE YOU?
CONVINCE THE DEAD.
I SHOULDN'T BE HERE ALONE...

GKK
LET THE CROWS TAKE YOU.
AH!
...AND I CERTAINLY SHOULDN'T BE HERE WITH *HIM*.
THREE NIGHTS IN ANTIVA, AND ALREADY THE SHOOTING STARTS.
IF ONLY I COULD BE SURPRISED.

CROWS WILL GUT THEM.
CROWS WILL SCATTER THEIR GUTS ON THE STREET --
WHAT AN ADORABLE IMAGINATION.
I KNEW AN ENTERTAINER WHO PERFORMED WITH DOG INTESTINES -- TERRIBLE MESS AT THE BAZAAR, THOUGH HE LOVED THE WORK.
OR WITH *HER*.
YET HERE WE ARE.

SHE CALLS HERSELF ISABELA. PIRATE. THIEF. SHARPEST BLADE IN RIVAIN, AND AN OLD... ACQUAINTANCE, OF SORTS.
SHE KNOWS ANTIVA -- AT LEAST THE PARTS I NEED TO VISIT.
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO KILL HIM.
YOU KILLED HIM -- THE MOMENT YOU GAVE HIM YOUR NAME.
WHO DOES THAT?
CUT HIM SOME SLACK, RIVAIN!
MOST KINGS CAN'T SPEAK A WORD WITHOUT A SCRIPT FROM THEIR ADVISORS.
THE DWARF IS VARRIC TETHRAS -- A MERCHANT WHO ACTS LIKE A BARKEEP OR A SPYMASTER, DEPENDING ON THE HOUR.
ISABELA'S TRAVELING COMPANION...AND NOW MINE, APPARENTLY.
FINE, FINE.
LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH --
-- BEFORE THE CROWS FIND US RAIDING THEIR ARCHIVE, PLEASE?
YOU THINK THAT WAS HIS COMMANDING VOICE?
I'M SURE IT WORKS IF YOU'RE FROM FEREDLDEN.

AS FOR ME? I'M A KING WHO SHOULDN'T BE.
AND I'VE MISSED WALKING INTO DEATH WITH THE WRONG PEOPLE AT MY SIDE.
HAVE YOU EVER DEALT WITH THE CROWS BEFORE, OH KING?
SORT OF.
THEN YOU UNDERSTAND THEY'RE NOT MERELY ASSASSINS --
(VERY TALENTED ASSAGGINS, MIND YOU.)
-- BUT THE INSIDIOUS LITTLE VOICE IN EVERY ANTIVAN NOBLEMAN'S EAR?
THAT'S THE RUMOR.
AND WHEN YOUR SOURCE TOLD YOU THAT THEIR CONTRACTS, THEIR BLACKMAIL FILES, THEIR SECRET HISTORIES, AND THEIR RECIPES WERE ALL HERE --
-- YOUR FIRST THOUGHT WAS, *I SHOULD KICK IN THE FRONT DOOR?*
IS THAT A CRITICISM?
NOT AT ALL. IN FACT, I'M IMPRESSED BY--
-- STOP!
WHAT?

NOT THE TIME FOR THIS, VARRIC --
LET HIM WORK.
HUH.
THP THP
TOOTH OF THE SERPENT.
THAT WASN'T SO --
KEEP WATCHING.
IT'S CALLED A DRAGON'S CRÈCHE -- A BUILDING DESIGNED TO KILL YOU.
THEY TAKE DECADES TO CONSTRUCT.
GOOD VANITY PROJECTS FOR THE OLD DWARVEN FAMILIES... CROWS, TOO, APPARENTLY.

I COULDVE DONE THAT.
NOT WITHOUT KEEN DWARVEN EYES.
YOU DO WHATEVER YOU CAME TO DO.
WE'LL TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING.
FALLING MOUNTAIN.
POISON WIND.
TRIPWIRE MECHANISM.
FIRE FOUNTAIN.
REALLY? WITH ALL THIS PAPER?
WHEEL OF LIQUID PAIN.
INTERESTING VARIATION ON THE STORM AGE DESIGN...
THIEF'S FOLLY.
A LITTLE OBVIOUS, TOO.

HALT!
FOUND ALL THE TRAPS BUT MISSED THE ALARM. HMPH.
KEEN DWARVEN EYES, INDEED.
HELLO, CLAUDIO.
WELL... ISABELA.
IF YOU'RE THIS DESPERATE FOR COIN ALREADY, I'M SURE I CAN FIND YOU AN ALLEY SOMEWHERE.
WAIT.
ARE YOU CLAUDIO VALISTI?

THEN YOU'RE KING ALISTAIR?
I HAD TO KNOW IT WAS REAL.
I'LL THANK THE MAKER BEFORE BEDTIME.
YOU'RE FORTUNATE I WAS THE ONE WHO RESPONDED TO THE ALARM.
MALDICIÓN!
I WASN'T EXPECTING YOU TO COME PERSONALLY.
YOU ARE CONVINCED NOW, THEN?
AND VELABANCHEL--
YES.
YES.
I SEE--
HOW WISE, YOUR MAJESTY.
--YOU DON'T TRUST THEM.
I THINK HE'S TALKING ABOUT YOU.
QUIET.
GO. YOU HAVE MAGNIFICENTLY ESCAPED OUR PURSUIT.
KNOW THAT I CANNOT AID YOU FURTHER.

THE PERFUMED SPRING.
ISABELA'S CHOICE AS A PLACE TO REGROUP -- NOT MINE.
PRINCE CLAUDIO VALISTI WAS MY HUSBAND'S BUSINESS PARTNER.
THE HUSBAND YOU KILLED?
THE HUSBAND I HAD KILLED, THANK YOU.
AND HOW DO YOU KNOW THIS "PRINCE AMONG CROWS," OH KING?
ZEVRAN PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH CLAUDIO, AND CLAUDIO'S INFORMATION BROUGHT ME HERE.
ZEVRAN THE ASSASSIN, HM?
ZEVRAN KNOWS A LOT OF PEOPLE.
LIKE YOU KNOW A LOT OF PEOPLE?
LISTEN TO ME, ALISTAIR.
YOU MUSTN'T BELIEVE A WORD THE PESTILENT BASTARD SAYS.
WHATEVER HE'S DONE FOR YOU --

I KNOW.
LOOK, NOBODY UNDERSTANDS COZYING UP TO SNAKES BETTER THAN I DO.
BUT THAT'S A JOB BEST HANDLED BY SOMEONE WHO CAN *AFFORD* BECOMING THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE FAMILY.
NOT THE MAN WITH A REPUTATION -- AND A CROWN -- TO PROTECT.
MY REPUTATION IS THE LEAST OF MY CONCERNS NOW, VARRIC.
AND WITH RESPECT, I DON'T KNOW *YOU* OR YOUR FAMILY.
WELL, I TRIED.
WHAT ABOUT THIS "*VELABANCHEL*," THEN? CLAUDIO MENTIONED --
IT'S A PRISON RUN BY THE CROWS.
MAKES THE ARCHIVE SEEM AS WELCOMING AS A BROTHEL.
PLANNING A VISIT?
SHOULD WE BAKE A CAKE WITH A FILE HIDDEN INSIDE?
THAT *NEVER* WORKS.
I'M PLANNING TO BREAK IN, *TONIGHT*.
WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR HELP.
TO BE CONTINUED...

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